
A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable the

HOUSE of COMMONS,

A T

St. Margaret's Westminster,

Friday the 16th of February, 1759.



Lunæ, 19^o die Februarii, 1759.

ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend the Dean of LINCOLN, for the Sermon by him preached on *Friday* last before this House at St. *Margaret's Westminster*, and that he be desired to print the same; and that Mr. *Edward Finch*, Mr. *Bacon*, Mr. *Vyner*, and Sir *Charles Mordaunt*, do acquaint him there-with.



J. DYSON, Cl. Dom. Com.

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Friday the 16th of February, 1759.

B E I N G

The Day appointed for a GENERAL FAST.

By *J O H N G R E E N*, D. D. *K*
DEAN of LINCOLN.

L O N D O N :

Printed for BENJ. DOD, in *Ave-Mary-Lane.*

MDCC LIX.

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S E R M O N

FOURTH SUNDAY

IN THE MONTH OF

AFTER THE 25th OF FEBRUARY

THE DAY OF THE YEAR

BY JOHN GARRARD

DEAN OF LINCOLN

LONDON:

Printed for J. & J. D. in Ar-Mag-Lan.

MDCCLXX

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ECCLESIASTES VII. 3.

*Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the
countenance the heart is made better.*

I N that collection of aphorisms, which Solomon
has left as the reflections of advanced age, and the
result of an enlarged experience, some of them
appear at first sight harsh and incredible; evidently
contrary to the prevailing sentiments of the world, and

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not clearly founded in the visible constitution of things. Yet these perhaps upon a nearer survey, when understood with those due limitations by which all general sayings are to be restrained, and directed to that point of view in which they were intended to be seen, will be found maxims of undoubted truth, and of much real use in the conduct of human life.

NONE of them seem more contradictory to the common apprehensions of men, or to the ordinary feelings of our nature ; none are therefore more likely to be received with prejudice, and to gain a slow admittance into our belief, than the passage before us. “ Is this agreeable to that experience, says the philosopher, which is probably the best test of truth in all cases, but unquestionably in *this*, where the appeal is made to our own senses ? Is that depression of mind, which sorrow produces, to be compared with that glow and exultation of the heart, which joy brings with it ? Is not cheerfulness recommended by the same wise writer, as the true way of enjoying the blessings of Providence ; as a state of mind most acceptable to, as it most acknowledges the goodness of our Maker, who plainly designed us to be happy, and has provided for us such ample materials of happiness ? ”

THIS declaration then must be interpreted with those proper restrictions, which may make it consistent with the benignity of God's nature, and the sensations
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of our own. The disquietude we feel from the evils of life, whether such as are the necessary lot of mortality, or may be owing to our own wrong judgment of things, when considered in itself and it's manner of affecting us, must needs make a disagreeable impression on the mind, and cannot be the object of our choice. But then to judge of it's usefulness, we must trace it through it's consequences; we must consider the effects it may produce, or the change it may make in the disposition; and it may rowse us from that habitual inconsideration, which is the common source of all vicious indulgences; it may bring on that seriousness, which is the first step towards a real amendment; by working in us a just sense of our misconduct, it may become the means of moral improvement; and thus, though severe or painful in the operation, may be greatly useful and salutary in it's effects.

THIS is not one then of those bold and fanciful paradoxes, the truth of which we cannot admit without doing violence to the affections of our nature. It is not here advanced, that we should confine ourselves, with the recluse, to a perpetual gloom and melancholy; or that we should abandon all the comforts of life with the spleen and moroseness of the enthusiast. But that it will be a part of wisdom, the best way often to prevent the seducements of prosperity, and the dangerous effects of a voluptuous life, to attend to those mournful occasions of reflection, which the pre-

lent state of human affairs will often set before us : that solemnities of this nature dispose us to recollect our scattered thoughts, tend to awaken us from that slumber of indolence into which ease and pleasure are apt to throw us, and therefore may be of great use in helping us to correct that false estimate of things, which in such a situation we are likely to make.

SEASONS of distress or difficulty will teach us to recall, what in a round of pleasures we may be in danger of forgetting, those manifold evils to which the condition of humanity is subject, and that melancholy event by which it must be concluded. In this serious frame of mind, we shall naturally be led to recollect many of those great truths, which however they may be overlooked, and which in a dissolute age are overlooked the most, yet will ever very nearly and intimately concern us : — such are, that we are plainly made of a free and accountable nature, and that there will probably be an enquiry into the use we have made of this freedom ; — that a mixed and complicated scene of things is placed before us, affording various temptations to run into the excesses of vice, as well as opportunities to improve in the practice of virtue, and therefore well fitted to try the real temper and disposition of intelligent and reasonable beings ; — that the natural evils of life, when dispensed by the hands of a supreme and moral governor, may justly be considered as instruments of correction, and were probably

probably intended as proper methods of bringing the inconsiderate to a due recollection of themselves;— that these stronger expressions of his anger sooner open the ear to instruction; these louder calls to reformation have been known to prevail, when the still voice of religion and conscience has not been attended to;— that these severe dispensations therefore, thus mixed and tempered with offers of mercy, have then their proper effect, when by awakening us to a just apprehension of our danger, and raising in us an affecting sense of our demerits, they produce at last that sincere and religious sorrow, which worketh repentance.

WE are now called by the voice of authority to prostrate ourselves before God with a becoming humiliation, to make a devout and publick acknowledgment of our dependance upon him, and to express a real concern for our many wilful and presumptuous deviations from our duty. And no occasion, on which we could assemble to implore his protection and mercy, was ever more awful, or can be more interesting to us; none ever more truly deserved our most serious reflections, or ought to fill us with more dutiful sentiments of his sovereign authority, than this, which the wisdom and piety of government has now set apart for our religious observance.

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FOR to whatever part of the universe we direct our view, with which we are in some degree connected. Whether we consider that apparent course of nature, to which the material world is subject, or the state of those nations, by which we are surrounded, we find every thing of late has been thrown into disorder; every thing has worn an alarming and hostile appearance, big with mischief, and threatening us with danger. The foundations of the earth have been in some sort out of course, and the most settled systems of human policy disjointed; that uniform manner, in which the visible world used to proceed, has been much disturbed by unusual commotions; and those formidable powers, whose mutual jealousy served to restrain the ambition, and to check the encroachments of each other, have entered into an unnatural union to disturb the peace, and invade the rights of their neighbours.

WE indeed have had but a small share in these dreadful convulsions of nature, which have buried magnificent cities in ruins, and spread terror through the whole extent of Europe and Afric. These repeated alarms may have occasioned that temporary sadness of countenance, which sudden apprehensions of danger will not fail to bring: but have they produced that due sense of our own unworthiness; have they wrought in us that genuine sorrow for our own abuses of God's mercy, by which alone the heart is made better?

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AND yet if the affairs of this universe are conducted under the government and superintendency of a being, who directs these harsh dispensations to moral purposes, and designs the sufferings of particular countries or men to be some way conducive to the improvement of the whole, it will much concern us to reflect, whether if we prove inattentive to these gentler admonitions, he may not reprove us in the louder tone of authority; whether if we remain uninstructed by the milder warnings, which we may receive in this school of discipline, he may not inflict upon us some of these sharper chastisements, which other nations have felt: the complicated and inexpressible misery of which must needs fill us with the most terrible apprehensions. How prudently then shall we act, if we can learn wisdom at the expence, and improve by the dear-bought experience of others!

BUT we have received many other notices of his displeasure, which that God, "who in his wrath ever thinketh upon mercy," has provided to remind men of their duty. We long smarted under the sore visitation of a grievous and destructive distemper, which wasted our flocks and herds. We suffered for some time the evils of scarcity, as our land did not yield her usual increase. These calamities might not be so sensibly felt by persons of higher rank and ampler fortunes; but they fate very heavy on the bulk of the nation, and brought
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the utmost distress on the lower class of our people. Let the removal of these sufferings be attended with the cheerful offerings of praise and thanksgiving; let us pay our unfeigned and devout acknowledgments to the father of mercies; and we cannot properly in any other manner acknowledge these instances of his mercy, than by having our hearts filled with such a grateful sense of his paternal care, as may dispose us to a sincere observance of his laws, and a dutiful return to his service.

HERE some deep inquirers into the operations of nature, and the uninquiring libertine on the credit of their testimony, will be ready to tell us, that these evils are owing to certain laws, fixed in the original establishment of things, and acting in a necessary manner; that as they depend not on our behaviour, they can neither be quickened by our immoralities, or retarded by our amendment.

THESE suggestions, by which the Deity is meant to be excluded from the administration of the universe, are not so strongly supported, as they are confidently made. Men's experience, that effects may by an intelligent and discerning eye be traced up to their respective causes, does not reach to the bottom of this enquiry; for as God makes use of these causes, as the common instruments of his government, what sagacity is quick enough

enough to discover, when they proceed in their usual course, and when they receive, as they may receive, from him such an immediate direction, as to answer the moral purposes for which he intends them; when, to use the psalmist's expression, "the wind blows where it listeth," and when, "it is made to fulfil his word?"

THE ablest masters in natural knowledge have thought, that the co-operation of a divine power is necessary for the support of the material system, and the continuance of the laws, by which it is governed. And if his agency be required to sustain the being, or to carry on the operations of matter; if gradual irregularities in its movements are to be corrected by occasional exertions of his power, is it a representation unbecoming the father of men, that he should extend his care to the concerns of free and intelligent beings, the most noble and excellent part of his workmanship? is an attention to rectify such disorders, as may arise in the moral system, a subject unworthy of his government?

THE powers of intellect and will, the distinguishing privileges of our nature, as they are capable by a right application to procure the greatest good, are also liable by a wrong one to produce the greatest evil. Some provision is indeed made in the constitution of things to correct the abuse of these powers. The controul and interruption, which passions of an opposite
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nature give to each other, do in some measure answer this purpose; they give room for the succours of reason to come in, and to act with more vigour and success. But yet the restless pursuits of ambition are frequently so sudden and violent in their effects, that whole kingdoms, one should think, would often be in danger of utter extinction without support from him, "who (in the " strong language of scripture) breaketh in pieces the " mighty:" who by methods, which may not destroy the use, or disturb the freedom of men's natural faculties, may so bend their views and actions to his purposes, as to do every thing, which we are taught he does, " according to the counsels of his own will."

WE have been also forced into a necessary war to oppose the encroachments of that over-bearing power, who has for ages past seized every favourable conjuncture to extend her empire: who has long cast a malignant look on this kingdom, as best enabled by it's strength, and disposed by it's principles, to defeat that plan of despotism, which she has been aiming to establish: who has therefore used unwearied application to match that naval force, which is the great bulwark of this nation; and make inroads on those distant possessions, which are a growing source of wealth and power to their parent country.

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By some refined arts she has found means to enter into connexions with those rival states, who for centuries past have been watching all her steps with the most jealous circumspection, and opposing her progress to that disproportioned greatness, to which she has so plainly aspired. By this dangerous confederacy a fierce and destructive war, which threatens the religion, the liberties, the being of many protestant states, has been kindled up in the heart of Europe, and has raged with unremitting fury. The event of this lies beyond the reach of human foresight. But the danger and importance of the conjuncture, call upon us with the deepest concern and most earnest resolutions of obedience to implore his protection, "who does according to his pleasure in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth *."

ONE of the great instruments, which Providence has raised up to withstand this unnatural combination of power, is that magnanimous prince to whom we are allied; whose talents are as extraordinary, and whose achievements have been as memorable, as the annals of any age or country have recorded. Great efforts have been made by ourselves: By the blessing of heaven on the firmness and intrepidity of our Sovereign, on the vigour and steadiness of our councils, on the resolution of our fleets and armies, our success

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* Dan. iv. 35.

has in many instances been answerable to the justice of the cause, in which we are engaged: and we no longer ask the continuance of this blessing from him, "whose eyes behold the thing that is equal," than we mean only to preserve and to secure our rights against the attempts of cunning, or the invasions of violence.

It is impossible to apprehend, and may our apprehension never be quickened by too sensible an experience, what outrage and devastation, what misery in all its variety of frightful shapes an incensed enemy is capable of bringing, and, to the reproach of the christian name, has often brought on their fellow-christians. O! may we never so far provoke the indignation of God, that he will permit us to fall into the hands of man! may we never so far neglect these milder warnings, that he will see it necessary to visit us with the severest of his chastisements! that he will suffer a relentless enemy to ravage our country, and make this land, now cultivated like Eden, "become a barren and desolate wilderness."

Are we startled at the thoughts of so much distress, but have we then been brought to practise those publick and private virtues, which are the best means to prevent it? may we not with reason apprehend severer marks of his displeasure, if we have obstinately persisted in our disobedience to his salutary laws, and stood out
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against all the various incitements, we have had, to reformation?

LET us then reflect, as this awful occasion calls upon us to do, on the present state of our morals: and will not such a reflection lead us with the deepest sorrow to confess our unworthiness? for if we are not so far depraved, as the spleenetic may imagine, or the morose represent us; yet has not the power of religion visibly declined in its influence? if we still join in the profession of the christian faith, and sometimes attend the public solemnities of worship, yet is the principle of righteousness, an essential part of the christian faith, the true end of all worship, in general found to reside in the heart, or to regulate our manners?

WE are apt to value our privilege of being protestants, the manly freedom we enjoy of thinking for ourselves, and worshipping God in the manner, we most approve. But do we appear to esteem it so much in our conduct, as we affect to do in our expressions? Do we not wear it chiefly as a badge of distinction, which serves rather to flatter our vanity, than to govern our practice? What a reproach must it be to us, if we be found to shew less zeal for the support, and less sincerity in the observance of a pure and reformed religion, than others do of a corrupt and superstitious one?

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THE superficial observer may imagine, that, as religion is chiefly placed in a spiritual intercourse between man and his Maker, the neglect of it may not produce any ill effects on the public welfare ; but whoever examines the matter with more attention, will see a close and inseparable connexion between religion and government ; will find, that the power of the one is necessary to secure the peace, and to support the authority of the other : and that in proportion, as it's impressions decay, human appointments will be sure to lose their force, and to decline in their influence.

THIS sad truth is too much confirmed by that abandoned prostitution of conscience, which is daily made by the breach of oaths ; it is too visible in that impatience under all legal restraints, that disregard to the injunctions of authority, which every-where prevails ; it has been too openly set to view in those tumultuary proceedings, by which some not long ago presumed to rejudge the acts, and controul the determinations of public wisdom. The distrust indeed of an ever-ruling power, at whose impartial tribunal we all must be accountable, will soon loosen the strongest engagements, under which a man can be laid ; as a settled disbelief of it will utterly annihilate all the obligations of morality. When this want of religious principle is diffused so far, as to enter strongly into a national character, it becomes

comes an alarming symptom of public disorder. Such noxious humours in the political body, in proportion as they prevail, must affect it's health; and they may prevail so far, as to endanger it's safety.

An unceasing pursuit of pleasure and expensive diversions, an intemperate passion for show, luxury and play, for whatever may feed our vanity, or amuse our leisure, or gratify our senses, which have been reckoned the unmanly features of the present age, have been found by the agreeing experience of all ages, hurtful to the prosperity of any nation. There is great reason to hope from the vigour and firmness of our government, and from the many recent instances of British spirit and bravery, with which it's orders have been executed, that this unpleasing representation of our country has either been aggravated, or that the disagreeable likeness is now wearing off. But a little reflection will help us to see the bad tendency and effect of those vices, wherever they shall be found to prevail.

ALL the parts of a community are connected together under different relations, in which each has a particular trust to discharge, or a proper character to support; every one is to contribute that share of service, which the duties of his situation require of him. When the several members of society execute this trust in a proper manner, the well-being of the whole is best promoted; when any are negligent in their charge, the
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public will suffer, and the greater that charge is, they will suffer the more. If this remissness too much prevails, the community will sensibly feel the ill effects of it; but if it grow general, the public strength will soon be weakened, and its stability endangered.

WILL not too eager a pursuit of private and sensual gratifications take men's attention from their proper sphere of action, and by degrees unfit them for acting properly? will it not debase the more manly and contract the more generous principles of their nature? will it not vitiate the disposition, and tend to make all their views terminate in the narrow circle of a mean and vicious self-love?

WILL the voluptuary, who gives the reins to his passions, be kept within the bounds of duty or of prudence? will he consider the consequences of his conduct, how himself or others may be affected by them? will he to gratify any desires of his own, refrain from abusing the good faith or credulity of his neighbour, from injuring him in the tenderest part of his property, or throwing perhaps a lasting gloom over the fairest prospect of domestic happiness?

WILL one of this principle pay more regard to the public, than to the private duties of life? will he not rather consider them as so many avocations from his
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main purpose, as so many impediments in his way to happiness? — can one, who is under the dominion of these selfish passions, feel any of those generous sentiments, which raise and dignify our nature? any of that enlarged and active benevolence, which animates and inspires the lover of his country?

As by all habits of self-indulgence our wants are multiplied, our desires will proportionably be excited to satisfy these wants; and they may be excited so far, as to make men break through all the distinctions of right and wrong, to gratify their importunity. In such a disordered state of things, public virtue will be treated as a visionary notion, national interest sacrificed to private views: the blessings of plenty will be changed into an artificial scarcity, legal provisions to stop these abuses will be artfully evaded; the violation of all laws divine and human, which tend to check any of the reigning vices, will be countenanced by fashion and protected by numbers; the most dangerous symptom, by which any community can be threatened!

THE chief end therefore of these severe dispensations appointed by God, and these solemn seasons of humiliation instituted by man, is to correct that levity and dissipation, which is the foundation of ill habits; to rouse men from that indolence and inconsideration, which is so dangerous to their virtue; to

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bring them to a sober recollection of themselves, and a just sense of their dependence upon God, as the best means of disposing them to an uniform and dutiful observance of his Laws.

WITHOUT this temper of obedience, the most punctual attendance on the outward offices of religion, the sharpest pangs of contrition, the highest flights of devotion, can never recommend us to his acceptance. The external garb of sorrow indeed without any real concern for our offences, which saddens the countenance without affecting the heart, must be esteemed as mean dissimulation and impious mockery by him, "who is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things."

WHILE on this awful occasion then we bend the knee in confession of our demerits, let us remember, that the principal aim of this religious act is to humble the soul, and to subdue the passions: while we devoutly lift the hand to heaven in acknowledgment of God's mercies, let us not forget that better part of raising our hearts and our affections thither. Let us, improved by his discipline, use the most effectual means of recovering his favour, by a sincere return to his service, and faithful submission to his authority. By uniting in this good resolution, we shall lay the surest foundation for publick prosperity, and may entertain

tain the best grounded hopes of future success. Then may we reasonably apply for his mercy, who when proper objects offer, is "willing to save;" then may we best take refuge under his protection, "who is the Lord, mighty in battle."

LET us with one voice address ourselves to the throne of grace, to grant us the best earnest of its favour, and the surest means of our happiness, by protecting and prolonging the life of our sovereign; and by inspiring his royal progeny with the same fortitude and prudence, with the same sentiments of justice and humanity, which may perpetuate to these kingdoms the invaluable blessings of a mild and equitable government.

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